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SUBJECT: Name Game: Southern Sudan Asserts Itself

¶1. As the people of Southern Sudan work to recover from the occupation by the North, many areas see changing the name of their village, county, or even state as a way to show the land is now theirs. The most significant of these changes is the recent decision of Bahr al-Jabal State to rename itself Central Equatoria. However, all over the south new counties are forming and towns are going back to their traditional names.

¶2. The state legislature of Bahr al-Jabal voted on April 6 to officially changing its name to Central Equatoria. According to state government officials, the name change has now been approved by both the governor of the state and by the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) Council of Ministers. It will become official as soon as GoSS President Salva Kiir issues a Presidential Declaration, which is expected shortly. However, the state government has already started using the new name for all state business. Since forming the state government, officials had been eager to cast off the Arabic name given them by the north and replace it with one they say reflects more their identity, and their unity with their brothers in greater Equatoria.

¶3. All across Southern Sudan, new counties are forming as residents reject the organization imposed on them by the north and form groups they feel are more appropriate. Examples include the break-away of Ikotos county from Torit county and the splitting of North Bor county into Twic East and Dukuk counties. This breaking-up and reforming of southern counties is expected to continue over the next year as residents better organize themselves for change.

¶4. Many towns have also reverted to a previous name. When asked why the names had changed, Southern Sudanese explained that as the war expanded, insecurity grew, and the northern government cracked down on assistance, more and more towns were placed on the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) no-go list. According to residents, they soon discovered that if they changed their name, either OLS security or government officials would not realize it was the same place and humanitarian assistance would continue. As towns go back to their old names, this confusion continues to create some problems for aid organizations. Acting Consul General Juba and PRM representatives had some difficulty booking a plane to inspect USG projects in Panyagor, until they discovered that the had to ask to go to Mabior -- Panyagor's wartime name.

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